

Be an Ethical Ecotourist

The CREW Marsh Trails are unique and beautiful, giving visitors a glimpse of the “real” Florida. As a visitor here we hope you appreciate your surroundings and abide by the “Leave No Trace” Code of Ethics:

- Respect other visitors and protect the quality of their experience.
- Be courteous.
- Leave rocks, plants and other natural objects as you find them.
- Avoid introducing or transporting non-native species.
- Observe wildlife from a distance.
- Do not follow or approach them. Never feed animals.
- Control pets at all times, or leave them at home. Dogs must be on a leash at all times.
- Let nature’s sounds prevail. Avoid loud voices and noises.
- Pack it in, pack it out - take all trash back home with you.

For more information about “Leave No Trace” principles, visit www.lnt.org.



CREW LAND & WATER TRUST

The CREW Marsh Trail System, which opened in December 1994, is a joint project of the CREW Land & Water Trust, Inc., the South Florida Water Management District, and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. The CREW Land & Water Trust was formed in 1989 as a private, nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation and stewardship of the water resources and natural communities in and around the Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed (CREW). The Trust was formed to coordinate the land acquisition, land management, and public use of the CREW project, which spans Lee and Collier Counties. The Corkscrew Marsh was purchased in 1990 by the South Florida Water Management District as part of the 60,000-acre CREW Project. Since 1990, more than 26,000 acres have been acquired and protected within the CREW Project with the help of many partnerships.



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The CREW Marsh Trails

Self-Guided Tour



The CREW Marsh Trail System consists of three trails which interconnect and are marked with numbered posts - the Pine Flatwoods Loop, the Marsh Loop, and the Hammock Trail. This brochure guides you through the marsh loop and hammock trails.



Welcome to the CREW Marsh Trails.

The trail system will lead you to the Corkscrew Marsh, a 5000-acre sawgrass marsh that is the headwaters for the Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed (CREW). A separate trail to the west will lead you to an awe-inspiring oak/palm hammock. On your hike, you will see examples of how the CREW watershed provides many benefits for humans and wildlife, including: providing a water supply, filtering the water, protecting people from floods, providing diverse wildlife habitat, and offering open space for recreation. Trail markers M1 - M5 are located near the trailhead. H1 - H5 mark the Hammock Trail, and M6 - M13 mark the Marsh Loop Trail.

M1 - A Watershed Collects Water

A watershed is an area of land where all the rainfall flows downhill to a common place such as into a river. Here, that place is the CREW Marsh. Consider that there are 25 miles and a 25-foot drop in elevation from here to the Estero Bay. Yet, from where you are standing to the marsh tower (less than a mile away), there is a ten-foot drop in elevation! So by south Florida



standards, you're on Pike's Peak! As you hike, try to notice the elevation change.

M2 – Pine Flatwoods Need Fire

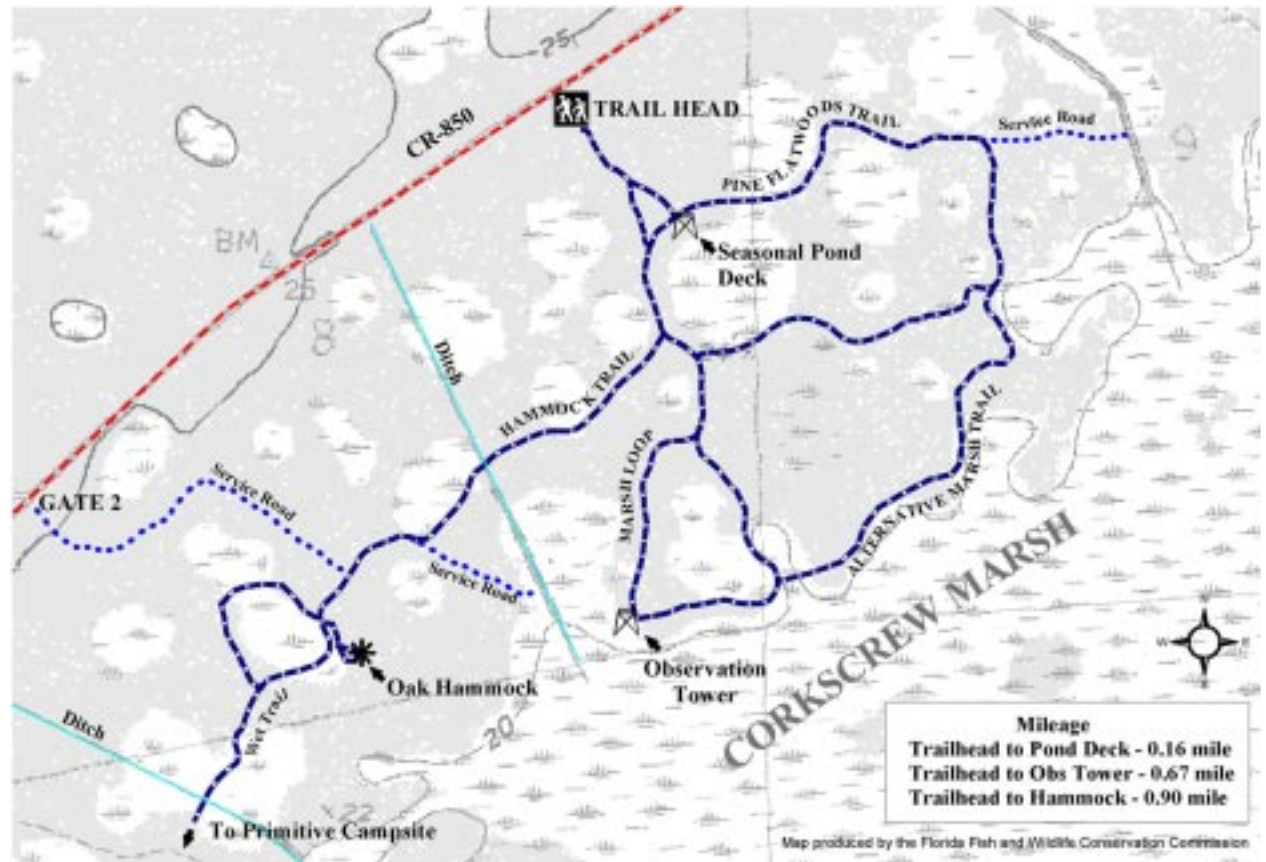
This plant community is called a pine flatwoods because needle-leaved slash pine trees dominate it. It is the highest and driest wildlife habitat found at CREW. You'll notice the trees are rather small here. That's because the previous



owners from 1940 until 1989 logged this area for lumber. The last time it was cut was 1989. The pines, the palmettos, and other under story plants here need fire to maintain optimal conditions for them to grow. The South Florida Water Management District conducts prescribed burns here every three to five years. Can you see any signs of a recent fire?

M3 – The Pond that's Not a Pond

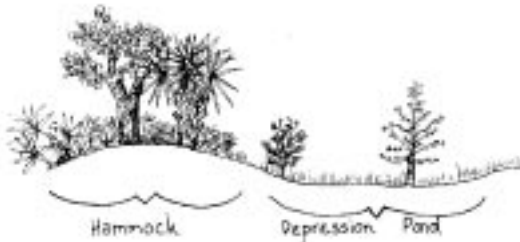
This pond only has water in it during the summer/fall rainy season. It's called a seasonal pond or a depression marsh. The pine



flatwoods are dotted with ponds like this one. Notice how the trees ring the pond and smaller plants grow in the middle where it is wetter. These wetland plants absorb pollutants and help clean the water.

M4 – Choosing Your Path

Here, you may elect to take a right and head west about one mile to a very unique oak/palm hammock, or tree island. Along the way, you will pass a drainage ditch and see some of the oldest slash pines in the CREW system. You will return to this point to get back to the trailhead. If you choose to remain on the marsh loop trail to the left, you will arrive at the observation tower in about half a mile. Either way, you can't lose. The scenery is wonderful on both trails.



H1 - H5 - Hammock Trail

H1 – This Water Comes from the North

The water here in this drainage ditch comes from runoff along County Road 850. It flows south into the Corkscrew Marsh. There the marsh plants slow it down and filter the water to make it cleaner. Do you see frogs or fish in the ditch? Sometimes even small alligators will show up here, so mind your step and keep your distance.

H2 – These Trees Didn't Get Cut

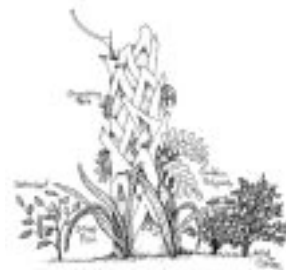
Notice that the pine trees here are larger and the surrounding vegetation is higher and thicker than when you first entered the trailhead. This area was not logged, probably because it was too wet. These large trees give you an idea what the pine flatwoods area near the trailhead will look like in the future. As you approach the hammock notice the slight lowering in elevation, the moister ground, and the increase in number of trees.

H3 – This Jungle is Really an Island

The hammock, an area of higher ground in a low-lying area, is actually a tree island. Wetter than the pine flatwoods, but drier than the surrounding marsh, the hammock plays a unique role in the CREW ecosystem. Ahead, you will cross a wooden footbridge into the center of the hammock. Take time to look up, down and all around as you cross the bridge.

H4 – It's All in the Shade

Hammock plants are not fire resistant, like many of the pine flatwoods plants are, but because of the lack of ground cover and relatively saturated soils, they rarely burn. These plants like moist soil, cooler temperatures, and lots of shade provided by the canopy of live oak and sabal palm branches! Notice



the variety of ferns growing on the trees. The resurrection fern, high up on the oak branches, is particularly interesting because it turns brown and shrivels up when it gets dry, but after a good rain, it resurrects itself and expands into a lush green fern. A variety of other plants such as wild coffee, mulberry, and satinleaf can be found in this hammock.

H5 – This Oak Could Tell a Lot of Stories

If trees could talk, this one would have a lot of stories to tell. This is a very old live oak (*Quercus virginiana*) – perhaps as many as 200 years old. It is one of the largest oaks within the CREW Project. Do you notice anything interesting about this tree other than its size?



Now, you can return to the marsh trail by retracing your steps past the ditch to marker M4. Then follow the signs to the observation tower (overlook).

Back to the Marsh Trail... M5 - M13

M5 – Open Space is Good for Us

As you hike these trails, appreciate the quiet solitude of CREW. It's a great place to get away from the sights and sounds of human civilization and tune into the rhythms of nature. Close your eyes and listen, lie on the ground and look at the sky, or just look for

critters in a dead log or tree nearby.

M6 – Lots of Animals Use CREW

Check out this animal highway – a pathway that leads into the woods. White-tailed deer, wild hogs, armadillos, Florida Black Bears, and endangered Florida Panthers all live here and use these animal highways to travel. Also look for tracks in the mud or sand, nests, scratchings, and scat – all signs that animals use CREW.

M7 – Downhill Means It's Getting Wetter

Notice anything different about the plant community that surrounds you now? Yes, the shade, the cooler air, the big sprawling live oak tree limbs overhead! You're going downhill! This oak hammock is closer to the marsh, so the soil is different, allowing moisture-loving plants to grow. Warblers gather here during migration, and Florida's state butterfly – the zebra longwing – can be seen flying by.

M8 – An Island of Trees Adds Variety to the Landscape

Take a walk through the short loop trail in this oak/palm hammock. Hammock plants are not fire resistant like many of the pine flatwoods plants, but because of the lack of ground cover and relatively saturated soils, they rarely burn. Notice the ferns growing on the trees. Large live oak trees and cabbage palms form a high canopy that provides a habitat for shade-tolerant plants. A variety of ferns, wild coffee, poison ivy,

and red bay trees can be seen here.

M9 – The Corkscrew Marsh – Land for Water

Here at the observation tower you look out over a grand 5000-acre sawgrass marsh that is the headwaters of CREW. This expanse of land provides a gathering place for water and allows it to spread out over the land. From here it flows south and southwest – eventually ending up in Estero Bay and the western Everglades. This marsh and its surrounding wetlands, provide clean, affordable water for people to use.

M10 – Florida's Rock Underpinnings Store Water

Below the surface of the CREW lands, there is a hard limestone rock called an aquifer. This rock is porous and allows water to creep into its crevices. Open space allows rainfall to soak into the aquifer and replenish our drinking water supplies.

M11 – Water - the Liquid of Life

Depending on what time of year you are here, you may see no water or you may be thigh-deep in water on this trail. That's because we get most of our 55 inches of annual rainfall in the summer and fall and very little in



the winter and spring. It also provides a safe place for alligators, otters, apple snails, dragonflies, herons and egrets to live and raise their young. What is the water level where you are now?

M12 - CREW is Rich with Wildflowers

April is the peak of wildflower season at CREW, but many species can be seen throughout the year. This field is an especially good place to find star rush, blue-eyed grass, grass pink orchids, *Lobelia*, and many others. Be sure to check out the CREW Wildflower Guide (seen at the trailhead) to identify all the blooming beauties as you hike.

M13 – CREW is a Watershed with a Purpose

Now that you've visited the Corkscrew Marsh and some of its surrounding habitats, you can see why it is so important to both people and animals. This watershed provides water supply and flood protection, food and shelter for a variety of wildlife, and a peaceful place for people to hike and enjoy nature. As you follow the signs back to the trailhead, be sure to stay observant. You never know what you'll see hiking from a different direction!



Come Back Again Soon!

CORKSCREW REGIONAL ECOSYSTEM WATERSHED